

Beowulf

IV

To him the stateliest spake in answer;
the warriors' leader his word-hoard unlocked:--
 "We are by kin of the clan of Geats,
 and Hygelac's own hearth-fellows we.
 To folk afar was my father known,
 noble atheling, Ecgtheow named.
 Full of winters, he fared away
 aged from earth; he is honored still
 through width of the world by wise men all.
 To thy lord and liege in loyal mood
 we hasten hither, to Healfdene's son,
 people-protector: be pleased to advise us!
To that mighty-one come we on mickle errand,
 to the lord of the Danes; nor deem I right
that aught be hidden. We hear -- thou knowest
 if sooth it is -- the saying of men,
 that amid the Scyldings a scathing monster,
 dark ill-doer, in dusky nights
 shows terrific his rage unmatched,
 hatred and murder. To Hrothgar I
 in greatness of soul would succor bring,
so the Wise-and-Brave [footnote 1] may worst his foes, --
 if ever the end of ills is fated,
 of cruel contest, if cure shall follow,
 and the boiling care-waves cooler grow;
 else ever afterward anguish-days
he shall suffer in sorrow while stands in place
 high on its hill that house unpeered!"
Astride his steed, the strand-ward answered,
clansman unquailing: "The keen-souled thane
 must be skilled to sever and sunder duly
 words and works, if he well intends.
 I gather, this band is graciously bent
to the Scyldings' master. March, then, bearing
 weapons and weeds the way I show you.
 I will bid my men your boat meanwhile
 to guard for fear lest foemen come, --
 your new-tarred ship by shore of ocean
 faithfully watching till once again
it waft o'er the waters those well-loved thanes,
-- winding-neck'd wood, -- to Weders' bounds,
 heroes such as the hest of fate
shall succor and save from the shock of war."

They bent them to march, -- the boat lay still,
fettered by cable and fast at anchor,
broad-bosomed ship. -- Then shone the boars [footnote 2]
over the cheek-guard; chased with gold,
keen and gleaming, guard it kept
o'er the man of war, as marched along
heroes in haste, till the hall they saw,
broad of gable and bright with gold:
that was the fairest, 'mid folk of earth,
of houses 'neath heaven, where Hrothgar lived,
and the gleam of it lightened o'er lands afar.
The sturdy shieldsman showed that bright
burg-of-the-boldest; bade them go
straightway thither; his steed then turned,
hardy hero, and hailed them thus:--
"Tis time that I fare from you. Father Almighty
in grace and mercy guard you well,
safe in your seekings. Seaward I go,
'gainst hostile warriors hold my watch."

Footnotes.

1.

Hrothgar.

2.

Beowulf's helmet has several boar-images on it; he is the "man of war"; and the boar-helmet guards him as typical representative of the marching party as a whole. The boar was sacred to Freyr, who was the favorite god of the Germanic tribes about the North Sea and the Baltic. Rude representations of warriors show the boar on the helmet quite as large as the helmet itself.